

PRESS RELEASE

Congressman John Conyers, Jr.

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Congressman Conyers Remembers **Chicago Mayor Harold Washington:** **What He Meant to Chicago, the Nation and the World**

Congressman John Conyers, Jr., Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee, issued the following statement in recognition of the 20th anniversary of the election of the late Chicago Mayor Harold Washington:

“Mayor Washington’s election was a landmark moment in American history. He was the first person to break through the divisive racial politics in a major American city and forge a multi-racial coalition government. That was no small feat in a city with the strong ethnic communities and intense political climate of the City of Chicago. He was the first African-American mayor of that city and his commitment to people, justice and equal rights made him the right person for the job, the only person who could pull all of Chicago together in a successful campaign to forge a new, inclusive political climate for a new future.

Mayor Washington was drafted for that job by the people. Bill Berry and other prominent leaders began a committee to elect him. They raised the money and convinced him to run. He asked me to join the campaign effort and I spent many weeks and months working with Reverend Jesse Jackson assisting the campaign in Chicago. It was historic trying to bring the races and political groups together. He was an amazing harmonizer and his victory was due to the fact that he brought a deeply segregated city together.

I had the pleasure of serving in Congress with Mayor Washington. Following his years of service in the Illinois House of Representatives and Senate, he was elected to Congress in 1980 and we served together on the House Judiciary Committee.

He was always a key force in the passage of anti-discrimination bills on the state level and was a champion for civil rights issues in Congress as well. I remember we went to Mississippi together in 1982 as part of the Parker-Coltrane Political Action Committee to work with citizens there on the extension of the Voting Rights Act - at a time when Mississippi still had no Black congressional representatives. We were amazed by the testimony of one witness whose house was split by the political redistricting lines: his bedroom was in one district and other parts of the house were in another district.

Mayor Harold Washington was a great man who served as an example of how much we can accomplish when we all work together to improve our communities and our nation. His election was a triumph of multiracial and multiethnic coalition building that we must not forget. At a time when we see the Republican party trying to divide the State of Texas and the nation by dividing our communities with their redistricting plan, we must remember Mayor Washington’s model, continue to fight against such divisive techniques and work together for universal voting rights and fair representation.

Mayor Harold Washington was a wonderful friend and I will always miss him.”

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